Mr. GRAY.

Engraved by J. R. Smith, from an Original Drawing in the possession of The Revd Mr. Potter.

7895

AN INQUIRY

INTO SOME PASSAGES IN

Dr. *Johnson*'s Lives of the Poets:

PARTICULARLY

HIS OBSERVATIONS ON

LYRIC POETRY,

AND

THE ODES OF GRAY.

BY R. POTTER.

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AN

INQUIRY, &c.

JUST Criticiſm, directed by ſuperior learning and judgement, and tempered with candor, muſt at all times have an happy influence on the public taſte, and of courſe be favourable to the intereſts and credit of literature. It is well known how much the age, in which he lived, was enlightened and refined by Mr. Addiſon; his judgement was juſt, his manner ſimple and elegant, and from his taſte there is no appeal; his page was, like the vernal ſun, bright and gentle; it gradually and imperceptibly diſpelled the miſts of barbariſm which hung over learning, and ſpread an intellectual light, the influence of which was univerſal and permanent. Every age is not ſo happy as to produce an Addiſon; yet the preſent age owes much to the vigorous and manly underſtanding of Dr. Johnſon: this truly reſpectable writer was early and deſervedly diſtinguiſhed by his great abilities, and the public

has ſo long been habituated to receive and ſubmit to his deciſions, that they are now by many conſidered as infallible. Some years ago he wrote the life of Savage, a man neither amiable nor virtuous, but of a ſingular character formed from ſingular circumſtances of diſtreſs, which never happened before, probably will never happen again in the life of any other man: undeſerved diſtreſs has a claim to pity; and pity has always in it ſome mixture of love, which wiſhes to palliate the failings of the unfortunate ſufferer; Dr. Johnſon has the feelings of humanity warm at his honeſt heart; he has therefore with a free and ſpirited indignation ſtigmatized the unnatural mother, and to her unrelenting cruelty ultimately refers the faults of the unhappy ſon, faults which truth would not allow him to ſuppreſs, nor his virtue incline him to defend. In his account of Savage as a Poet, he places his genius in the faireſt light, and makes juſt apologies for his inaccuracies. This little tract was written with an animated glow of ſentiment, a vigorous and clear expreſſion, and a pleaſing candor ſometimes perhaps ſtretched a little beyond the line of judgement: it pleaſed; it muſt always pleaſe: no wonder then that the public expreſſed no ſmall degree of ſatisfaction, when it was known that this celebrated author was engaged in writing the Lives of the moſt eminent Engliſh Poets, with critical obſervations on their works; much was expected from his knowledge and judgement; but high raiſed expectations are frequently diſappointed: in theſe volumes, amidſt the many juſt obſervations, the ſolid ſenſe, and deep penetration which even his enemies muſt admire, his warmeſt friends find ſome paſſages which they muſt wiſh unwritten or obliterated.

It is not my intention to follow the Biographer through all the lives he has written; but, after a few curſory remarks, theſe pages will be confined to his obſervations on Lyric Poetry, particularly on the Odes of Mr. Gray. As I ſhall have frequent occaſions to diſſent from the Critic's judgement, I ſhall give my reaſons freely and firmly, but with great reſpect to his underſtanding and virtues.

" With the political tenets of the writer, I have nothing to do; my buſineſs is with his criticiſm:" yet it were to be wiſhed that the ſpirit of party had not been ſo warmly diffuſed through this work; it is often diſagreeable, but in the Life of Milton it is diſguſting: not that I am inclined to defend the religious or political principles of our great poet; I know too well the intolerant ſpirit of that liberty, which worked its odious purpoſes through injuſtice, oppreſſion, and cruelty; but it is of little conſequence to the preſent and future ages whether the author of Paradiſe Loſt was Papiſt or Preſbyterian, Royaliſt or Republican; it is the Poet that claims our attention: if however in the life of Milton it were neceſſary to take notice of the part he bore in thoſe diſaſtrous times, it might have been more eligible to have imitated the moderation of J. Philips, who, though he wrote more than ſeventy years nearer thoſe times, when the facts were yet freſh on mens memories, checked his expreſſion of the abhorrence of them, through reſpect to his maſter, with this beautiful apoſtrophe,

And had that other Bard,
Oh, had but he, that firſt ennobled ſong

With holy raptures, like his Abdiel been,
'Mongſt many faithleſs, ſtrictly faithful found;
Unpity'd he ſhould not have wail'd his orbs,
That roll'd in vain to find the piercing ray,
And found no dawn, by dim ſuffuſion veil'd!
But he——However, let the Muſe abſtain,
Nor blaſt his fame, from whom ſhe learn'd to ſing
In much inferior ſtrains.——

We are alſo ſorry to ſee the maſculine ſpirit of Dr. Johnſon deſcending to what he perhaps in another might call "anile garrulity." In reading the life of any eminent perſon we wiſh to be informed of the qualities which gave him the ſuperiority over other men: when we are poorly put off with paltry circumſtances, which are common to him with common men, we receive neither inſtruction nor pleaſure. We know that the greateſt men are ſubject to the infirmities of human nature equally with the meaneſt; why then are theſe infirmities recorded? Can it be of any importance to us to be told how many pair of ſtockings the author of the Eſſay on Man wore? Achilles and Therſites eat, and drank, and ſlept; in theſe things the Hero was not diſtinguiſhed from the Buffoon: are we made the wiſer or the better by being informed that the Tranſlator of Homer ſtewed his Lampreys in a ſilver ſaucepan? Who does not bluſh when he finds recorded that idle ſtory of a nameleſs critic, who ſaid of the author of the Fleece, *He will be buried in woolen?* Is this held up for wit? Is it intended as a ſarcaſm on Dyer? Is it not an inſult to the underſtanding of the reader? Let me ſtop a moment to ſpeak

of

of this writer. " Dyer is not a poet of bulk or dignity ſufficient to require an elaborate criticiſm." Does Dr. Johnſon eſtimate poetical merit, as Rubens did feminine beauty, *by the ſtone?* Well then might he recommend Blackmore to us. If the Fleece be now univerſally neglected, let me join my teſtimony to that of Akinſide, that ſuch neglect is a reproach to the reigning taſte; the poem is truly claſſical: to ſay that " Dyer's mind was not unpoetical," is parſimonious praiſe; he had a benevolent heart, a vigorous imagination, and a chaſtiſed judgement; his ſtyle is compact and nervous; his numbers have harmony, ſpirit, and force,

On they move
Indiſſolubly firm; nor obvious hill,
Nor ſtreit'ning vale, nor wood, nor ſtream divides
Their perfect ranks.——

The preſent paſſion for anecdotes may make theſe levities pardonable: but when the narrative goes further, and reflects upon the ſocial and moral character of a worthy perſon, it muſt be taken up in an higher tone. We are carefully informed of the avidity of Addiſon, of the eagerneſs with which he laid hold on his proportion of the profits ariſing from the papers of the Spectator, of his unmerciful exaction of an hundred pounds lent by him to Steele. If this be true, it only ſhows that Addiſon had not " exalted his moral to divine:" but the intervention of more than ſixty years has not yet obliterated the remembrance of his gentle manners and benevolent diſpoſition: that Steele was not an œconomiſt is well known; but what authority Dr. Johnſon has for ſaying that

Addiſon reclaimed his loan by an execution, we are not told: I am told by the beſt authority that it is an abſolute falſehood.† This vindication is due to the memory of a man, who was univerſally reſpected whilſt he lived, and "of whoſe virtue it is a ſufficient teſtimony, that the reſentment of party has tranſmitted no charge of any crime;" "who taught, with great juſtneſs of argument and dignity of language, the moſt important duties, and ſublime truths;" "who employed wit on the ſide of virtue and religion, purified intellectual pleaſure, ſeparated mirth from indecency," enlightened and refined the age in which he lived, "and excited ſuch an emulation of intellectual elegance, that, from his time to our own, life has been gradually exalted, and converſation purified and enlarged."

This purity, this enlargement leads us to reſent the cruel manner in which Dr. Johnſon ſpeaks of the Lady, who is the ſubject of Hammond's Elegies: an old Goth would not have been guilty of ſuch an indelicacy: but whatever character her lover, or his Biographer, may have bequeathed her, thoſe, who were ſo happy as to be acquainted with her, ſpeak of her as a very excellent and amiable woman. This offence againſt truth and good manners is the more inexcuſable, as Dr. Johnſon had opportunities enough of informing himſelf of the Lady's real character. With regard to Hammond, whether Mr. Shiels was miſled by falſe accounts I cannot determine; but that this Poet was not the Son of Anthony Hammond, who was allied to Sir Robert Walpole by marrying his Siſter, I can aſſure the public upon the authority of that reſpectable family. His Elegies certainly have faults, which the Critic is

† Here we have but anaſſertion in oppoſition to another, which the author calls a vindication!

is eagle-eyed to diſcover; but they have beauties, againſt which he ſhuts his eyes; a younger man might perhaps ſay with Spenſer,

> Such one's ill judge of love, that cannot love,
> Ne in their frozen hearts feel kindly flame.
> For-thy they ought not thing unknown reprove,
> Ne natural affection faultleſs blame.

"Why Hammond, *or other writers*, have thought the quatrain of ten ſyllables elegiac, it is difficult to tell." Perhaps the difficulty is not great; the next ſentence may ſerve to explain it; "the character of the Elegy is gentleneſs and tenuity;" no other meaſure in the Engliſh language glides with ſuch eaſy ſweetneſs, and in ſuch a gentle ſtrain of melody. "But this Stanza has been pronounced by Dryden, whoſe knowledge of Engliſh metre was not inconſiderable, to be the moſt magnificent of all the meaſures which our language affords." The critic himſelf accounts for this opinion of Dryden, "Davenant was perhaps *at this time* his favourite author, though Gondibert never appears to have been popular; and from Davenant he learned to pleaſe his ear with the ſtanza of four lines alternately rhymed." The elegant Aikins, in their diſſertation on Gondibert, have adverted to its meaſure with propriety and fine taſte. But it is not for nothing that this opinion of Dryden is held out to us: Mr. Gray's Elegy is written in this metre; it had been too deſperate to have hazarded an open attack on that poem; the Critic therefore ſhelters himſelf behind the authority of Dryden, and ſeems to direct his cenſure againſt Hammond, whilſt the ſhaft is aimed at Gray.

It

It is pleaſant enough to find this writer, who has ſo long dictated to the public taſte, and that in a pretty high tone, gravely doubting whether the art of Gardening, in the preſent enlarged acceptation of the word, demands any great powers of mind: the manner, in which he puts the queſtion, plainly ſhows his own opinion; but whatever "a ſullen and ſurly ſpeculator may think," the true judge of beautiful nature will eſteem it an elegant exertion of real genius. But the taſteleſs ridicule on Shenſtone is only the introduction to a cruel and unjuſt reflection on Lord Lyttelton. "For awhile the inhabitants of Hagley affected to tell their acquaintance of the little fellow that was trying to make himſelf admired; but when by degrees the Leaſowes forced themſelves into notice, they took care to defeat the curioſity which they could not ſuppreſs, by conducting their viſitants perverſely to inconvenient points of view, and introducing them at the wrong end of a walk to detect a deception; injuries of which Shenſtone would heavily complain. Where there is emulation there will be vanity, and where there is vanity there will be folly." I reſpect my reader, and my ſelf, too much to treat this malignant aſperſion with the aſperity it deſerves. If the eminent virtues, the liberal diſpoſition, and benevolent heart of Lord Lyttelton could not ſecure his character from ſuch a rude attack, who may hope to eſcape? But happily the ſtory carries its own confutation in itſelf: "the ſpacious and opulent empire" can have no emulation of "the petty ſtate, on which it looks with diſdain." Can the majeſtic Skiddow be a jealous rival of the little unanimated hills of Dovedale? A candid writer will not record every idle tale he hears, which reflects

diſhonour

diſhonour on a great and good character; but when he is aſſured that the tale is falſe, it becomes his duty, as an honeſt man, to retract it; Dr. Johnſon had this aſſurance from the moſt honourable authority, which he ought to have reſpected, and to have done juſtice to the worthy inhabitants of Hagley. Detraction is an unamiable quality; "a man, ſaid an excellent perſon on this occaſion, who could take a pleaſure in defacing fine pictures, or mutilating exquiſite ſtatues, would be juſtly odious; becauſe he would deprive elegant ſpectators of the pleaſure ariſing from beautiful objects, and artiſts of proper ſubjects of imitation; but the man, who endeavours to deface and mutilate examples of virtue, is guilty of a much greater crime."

It is not without ſome degree of honeſt indignation that a perſon of candor obſerves this ſpirit of detraction diffuſed ſo univerſally through theſe volumes: of more than fifty of our Poets, whoſe lives are here given, how few have paſſed free from very ſevere cenſures? the writer may have "been led to this beyond his intention;" but could it be "by the honeſt deſire of giving uſeful pleaſure?" If the Man has the good fortune to eſcape, the Poet is almoſt ſure to be condemned: the work puts one in mind of the wicker Coloſſus of the Druids, in whoſe chambers of tribulation an hecatomb of wretches was at once offered as victims to ſome grim idol ſuppoſed to be propitiated by ſuch horrid ſacrifices.

Many of theſe writers,

Like twinkling ſtars the miſcellanies o'er,

were indeed but faint luminaries in the hemiſphere of poetry; yet each ſhone with his portion of light, however ſmall; and it was the Critic's province to diſcriminate their luſtre, and to ſhow how much, or how little, each contributed to the general brightneſs. To have conſidered how learning and taſte were gradually improved by them, how our language was enriched, and the harmony of its numbers refined; to have aſcertained with ſome degree of preciſion the various powers, the peculiar vein, the naïveté of each poet, would have been a curious and an uſeful inveſtigation: this is done with much learning, judgement, and accuracy in the Life of Cowley; which gave the reader a reaſonable expectation of continued entertainment and inſtruction; but he was ſoon diſappointed; one indiſcriminating cenſure hides the face of things, and we are left to wander undirected in this gloom,

> Quale per incertam lunam ſub luce malignâ
> Eſt iter in ſylvis, ubi cœlum condidit umbrâ
> Jupiter, et rebus nox abſtulit atra colorem.

As the Poems of Pomfret, Yalden, and Watts, and the Creation of Blackmore were inſerted in this collection by the recommendation of the Biographer, we may from thence form ſome judgement of his taſte. He, who does not diſlike Pomfret, may approve Yalden; he, who finds pleaſure in Blackmore, may be enraptured with Watts. But this ſagacious and penetrating Critic has the peculiar felicity of diſcovering that Blackmore "finds the art of uniting ornament with ſtrength, and eaſe with cloſeneſs. This, he tells us is a ſkill which Pope might

might have condeſcended to learn from him, when he needed it ſo much in his Moral Eſſays *". Of Blackmore's ſkill, " his ratiocination and deſcription," theſe lines from the Song of Mopas, annexed to his Life, are an happy ſpecimen;

> He ſpread the pure cerulean fields on high,
> And arch'd the chambers of the vaulted ſky,
> Which he, to ſuit their glory with their height,
> Adorn'd with globes, *which reel as drunk with light.*

Further inſtances of this Critic's want of taſte I leave to the obſervation of others; he may ſoon hear of them from a very ingenious and reſpectable writer, who wants not ſpirit or ability to do juſtice to the injured Poets: my buſineſs is to attend him into the regions of Lyric Poetry. His good ſenſe led him to reprobate that lax and lawleſs verſification, which, under the name of Pindaric Odes, had long been a diſgrace to Poetry and Pindar; but it is with ſome degree of aſtoniſhment that we find him ſo warm in his commendations of Dryden's Poem on the death of Mrs. Killigrew; this, he ſays, " is undoubtedly the nobleſt Ode that our language ever produced. The firſt part flows with a torrent of enthuſiaſm. Fervet, immen-

* The revival of theſe Poems, the commendation of Blackmore, and the cenſure of Pope, gave occaſion to the following Epigram.

Similes habent labra lectucas.

> Yon Aſs in vain the flow'ry lawns invite;
> To mumble thiſtles his ſupreme delight.
> Such is the Critic, who with wayward pride
> To Blackmore gives the praiſe to Pope denied;
> Wakes Yalden's embers, joys in Pomfret's lay,
> But ſickens at the heav'n-ſtrung lyre of Gray.

ſuſque ruit." This praiſe is finely expreſſed, but unhappily it is not juſt: what he ſays of the Threnodia may be applied to this poem alſo; "its firſt and obvious defect is the irregularity of its metre, to which the ears of that age, however, were accuſtomed. What is worſe, it has neither tenderneſs nor dignity, it is neither magnificent nor pathetick. He ſeems to look round him for images, which he cannot find, and what he has he diſtorts by endeavouring to enlarge them." This is ſevere, but juſt criticiſm. It would be trifling and invidious to call the attention of the reader to the feeble efforts of Yalden's lyre; yet this Critic ſays that his Hymn to Darkneſs "is for the moſt part imagined with great vigour, and expreſſed with great propriety:—the tenth ſtanza is inexpreſſibly beautiful." I tranſcribe it for the ſatisfaction of the reader;

Thou doſt thy ſmiles impartially beſtow,
And know'ſt no difference below,
All things appear the ſame by thee,
Though Light diſtinction makes, Thou giv'ſt equality.

Theſe are the lyrical productions which Dr. Johnſon commends; but he ſeems to have contented himſelf with a very inaccurate and unclaſſical idea of this compoſition, which long ago he thus expreſſed, "The imagination of the firſt authors of lyrick poetry was vehement and rapid, and their knowledge various and extenſive. Living in an age when ſcience had been but little cultivated, and when the minds of their auditors, not being accuſtomed to accurate inſpection, were eaſily dazzled by glaring ideas, they applied themſelves to inſtruct rather by ſhort ſentences and ſtriking thoughts,

thoughts, than by regular argumentation; and finding attention more ſucceſsfully excited by ſudden ſallies and unexpected exclamations, than by the more artful and placid beauties of methodical deduction, they looſed their genius to its own courſe, paſſed from one ſentiment to another without expreſſing the intermediate ideas, and roved at large over the ideal world with ſuch lightneſs and agility that their footſteps are ſcarcely to be traced. From this accidental peculiarity of the antient writers the criticks deduce the rules of lyrick Poetry, which they have ſet free from all the laws by which other compoſitions are confined, and allow to neglect the niceties of tranſition, to ſtart into remote digreſſions, and to wander without reſtraint from one ſcene of imagery to another."—Rambler, N° 158.

This ſurely is a very unſcholarlike account. The firſt Lyric Poets, whoſe fine productions have eſcaped the devaſtations of time, felt the poetic enthuſiaſm in an high degree; they wrote not in barbarous times, but in the moſt enlightened age of Greece; they did not attempt to dazzle by glaring ideas and ſudden ſallies, but they knew that rapture, not argumentation, was the conſtituent part of that ſpecies of poetry which they cultivated. The Ode originally was a ſacred compoſition, and employed in celebrating the praiſes of the gods; hence that religious air of ſolemn grandeur which in a manner hallows the performance; ſometimes it was of the prophetic caſt, and of courſe aſſumed a myſterious and aweful obſcurity; in theſe the ſublime genius of Æſchylus is unrivaled. It then deſcended to ſing the actions of Demi-

gods

gods and Heroes: this was the province of Pindar, and his excellence in it is inimitable;

Ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι,
Τίνα θεὸν, τιν' ἥρωα,
Τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν;

Hence it appears that this compoſition not only allowed, but even required ſudden and bold tranſitions, and the higheſt flights of imagination to which even the Epic Muſe dared not aſpire: ſhe preſcribed laws to herſelf, which confined her to one great action; and ſhe purſues her plan with grave dignity: but the Lyric is a Muſe of fire that riſes on the wings of Extaſy, and follows her Hero or her God from one glorious action to another, from earth to heaven. Yet we are unjuſt to theſe great writers, if we ſuppoſe that they gave a looſe to their genius, and roved at random over the ideal world; they had judgement as well as imagination; and though they diſdained to be in ſubjection to rules which have no relation to their province, yet they have their ſpecific laws which they never tranſgreſs. Sublimity is the eſſential and characteriſtic perfection of the Ode; where this can be attained by "the placid beauties of methodical deduction," that artful courſe is purſued; but it is more often ſeized by a rapid and impetuous tranſition; yet this is always under the controul of ſome nice connexion, is never vague and wanton, never loſes ſight of its important object. The Ode is daring, but not licentious; though it is great, it diſclaims "the proud irregularity of greatneſs."

Collins

Collins was the firſt of our poets that reached its excellence: his mind was impreſſed with a tender melancholy, but without any mixture of that ſullen gloom which deadens its powers; it led him to the ſofteſt ſympathy, that moſt refined feeling of the human heart; his faculties were vigorous, and his genius truly ſublime; his ſtyle is cloſe and ſtrong, and his numbers in general harmonious. He was well acquainted with Æſchylus and Euripides, and drew deep from their fountains: his thoughts had a romantic caſt, and his imagination a certain wild grandeur, which ſometimes perhaps approaches to the borders of extravagance; but this led him to deſcriptions and allegories wonderfully poetical; ſuch for inſtance is the Antiſtrophe in his Ode to Liberty, and the firſt part of his Ode to Fear; Æſchylus himſelf has not a bolder conception, and the grandeur of thought is as greatly expreſſed. Dr. Johnſon ſpeaks of this ſublime Poet with a tenderneſs which reflects honour on himſelf; he allows him ſometimes to have ſublimity and ſplendor, but in the coldneſs of criticiſm expreſſes ſome diſapprobation of his allegorical imagery, and is unjuſt to his harmony.

The want of a good taſte in a profeſſed Critic is a mental blindneſs which totally incapacitates him for the diſcharge of the high office he has aſſumed; but the want of good manners is an offence againſt thoſe laws of decorum which, by guarding the charities of ſociety, render our intercourſe with each other agreeable: yet there is in ſome perſons a blunt and ſurly humour, which prides itſelf in deſpiſing theſe laws of civility; and often with an awkward affectation of pleaſantry they play their rude gambols to make mirth, and

Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,
Tempeſt the ocean.

To whatever liberal motive this conduct may poſſibly be imputed, we are told by an excellent writer that "there is a certain expreſſion of ſtyle and behaviour which verges towards barbariſm; and that it is a degree of barbariſm to aſcribe nobleneſs of mind to arrogance of phraſe or inſolence of manners." If there is a writer who, more than others, has a claim to be exempted from this pelting petulance, Mr. Gray has that claim: his own poliſhed manners reſtrained him from ever giving offence to any good man, his warm and chearful benevolence endeared him to all his friends; though he lived long in a college, he lived not *ſullenly* there, but in a liberal intercourſe with the wiſeſt and moſt virtuous men of his time; he was perhaps the moſt learned man of the age, but his mind never contracted the ruſt of pedantry; he had too good an underſtanding to neglect that urbanity which renders ſociety pleaſing; his converſation was inſtructing, elegant, and agreeable; ſuperior knowlege, an exquiſite taſte in the fine arts, and above all purity of morals and an unaffected reverence for religion made this excellent perſon an ornament to ſociety and an honour to human nature.

From this pleaſing recollection of the merits of the man I now turn to his Lyric Poetry, in which he ſhines with ſuperior luſtre. His Ode on the Spring has an elegance of compoſition, an harmony of numbers, a richneſs of fancy, and a glow of colouring not to be found in any other writer; it is in the brighteſt manner of Pindar, and has reached perfection by

 blending

This is false. We have Ld. Orford's authority for Gray's attachment to Deism.

blending with thoſe vivid images the ſofteſt ſhades of melancholy morality; it reſembles the beautiful and virtuous Andromache, in her interview with Hector, ſmiling through her tears. "This Ode, ſays the Critic, has ſomething poetical both in the language and the thought; but the language is too luxuriant, and the thoughts have nothing new.—The morality is natural, but too ſtale; the concluſion is pretty." Had the language been leſs luxuriant, the Ode had been leſs beautiful, and leſs adapted to the ſmiling ſeaſon. The Thoughts, conſidered ſeparately, may not be new; but who has ever combined ſuch an aſſemblage of poetical images, and cloathed them in ſuch a ſplendid diction? Others may have contemplated the race of man and the inſect youth as fluttering alike through life's little day; but who has repreſented the gaudy inſect as retorting on the moraliſt in a vein of philoſophy ſo peculiarly ſuitable to the ſportive kind? The images of Nature have for ages worn the ſame form, and the ſober eye of Contemplation may always have viewed them in the ſame light; but the poet's ſkill in ſelecting, diſpoſing, and adorning them gives them all the grace of novelty. The Critic objects to one word in this Ode; "there has of late, ſays he, ariſen a practice of giving to adjectives, derived from ſubſtantives, the termination of participles; but I was ſorry to ſee, in the lines of a ſcholar like Gray, the *honied* ſpring." Our language derives much grace and ſtrength from converſions of a like nature, and has long been in poſſeſſion of this word, which it is likely to retain upon the authority of Shakeſpear and Milton, at leaſt till its impropriety be better proved. It is obſervable that the Latin language has its *mellitus*, formed upon

the ſame conſtruction, and its pureſt and moſt correct writers ſcrupled not to make uſe of it.

A diſtant proſpect of Eton College inſpires the Poet with that enthuſiaſm, which marks the genius of Lyric Poetry; in a glow of rapture he addreſſes the holy Henry's towers, and thoſe that crown the ſtately heights of Windſor, the hills, the groves, the fields over which he had ſo often ſtrayed: the gales, which breathe from them, ſooth his ſoul, and give him a momentary ſenſation of joy and youth. In the ſame glow of enthuſiaſm he aſks Father Thames what youths are now bathing in his ſtream, or ſporting on his banks: this happy race he follows through their paths of pleaſure with the moſt enchanting ſtrains of poetry; but at length looks beyond their preſent chearful and thoughtleſs day to the various afflictions which may embitter their future life; theſe he pathetically deſcribes, and concludes with a moral reflection on the various ſufferings of mankind, and the folly of inquiring into diſtant ills, the knowlege of which would deſtroy preſent happineſs. Yet Dr. Johnſon ſays "the Proſpect of Eton College ſuggeſts nothing to Gray, which every beholder does not equally think and feel." How great is that ſagacity, which diſcovers the thoughts and feelings of others before they are declared? But the Critic perhaps only means, as before, that the thoughts have nothing new: on this ſubject a candid and judicious inquirer ſays, "in any ſuppoſed combination of circumſtances one train of thought is, generally, moſt obvious, and occurs ſooneſt to the underſtanding; and it being the office of poetry to preſent the moſt *natural* appearances, one cannot be much ſurprized to find a coincidence of reflection."—On Poetical

Imitation.—The affectation of new thoughts is too apt to divert the mind from the ſimple and genuine appearances of things, and uſually produces quaint and far-fetched conceits; as the Painter, who diſdains to copy Nature or to follow the great maſters of deſign, aims at a manner of his own, and inſtead of the umbrageous pine or the knotty hardihood of the giant oak, gives us ſtrait and ſlender ſtems, a poverty of foliage, and a colouring which Nature never knew. Mr. Gray had too good an underſtanding and too fine a taſte to be a Manieriſt. The Critic proceeds, "His ſupplication to Father Thames to tell him who drives the hoop or toſſes the ball, is uſeleſs and puerile. Father Thames has no better means of knowing than himſelf." Criticiſm of this nature breathes a frigid air, which chills all the faculties of genius. Theſe imperſonations and addreſſes to woods, mountains and ſtreams,

Omnia quæ Phœbo quondam meditante, beatus
Audiit Eurotas, juſſitque ediſcere lauros,

give to poetry a peculiar animation, and conſtitutes one of her greateſt beauties; every thing hears her voice. Of that tender apoſtrophe of Æneas to the aſhes of Troy,

Iliaci cineres, et flamma extrema meorum,
Teſtor, in occaſu veſtro nec tela, nec ullos
Vitaviſſe vices Danaûm, &c.

ſhall it be ſaid that they could bear no teſtimony to his pious valour, and had no better means of knowing it than Dido herſelf? Shall we lop from Milton that ſublime addreſs of Satan to the Sun as uſeleſs and puerile, becauſe the Sun had

no means of hearing his call? Or rather ſhall we not, without regard to the oppoſition of this arbitrary Critic, leave the free people of Parnaſſus their antient right of addreſſing the kings of the floods, and other poetical ſovereigns?—" His epithet *buxom* health, the Critic ſays, is not elegant; he ſeems not to underſtand the word." Milton thought the word at leaſt not inelegant; he has uſed it twice, perhaps in different ſenſes. I leave Dr. Johnſon to ſettle its preciſe meaning with that reſpectable dealer in words Dr. Adam Littleton. Of Mr. Gray's language I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak elſewhere.

The Hymn to Adverſity has in a ſupreme degree every excellence which dignifies this ſpecies of poetry. It opens, like the fineſt Odes of the great maſters of antiquity, with an addreſs to the goddeſs, and enumerates her aweful attributes in a ſtrain truly ſublime; it then repreſents Jupiter as ſending his darling child, Virtue, to be trained by this rugged Nurſe, before whoſe frown Folly's idle brood diſperſe; but Wiſdom, Melancholy, Charity, Juſtice, and Pity attend her ſteps: it concludes with a ſupplication to the goddeſs not to appear in her Gorgon terrors, nor ſurrounded with her vengeful band; but to wear her more benign form, and bring her milder train, whoſe influence ſoftens, not wounds the heart. The ſolemnity of theſe ſentiments is ennobled by a grandeur of imagery, and the dignity of expreſſion receives new graces from the ſober harmony of the lyre. " Of this Hymn, we are told, the hint was at firſt taken from

O Diva, gratum quæ regis Antium;

but

but Gray has excelled his original by the variety of his ſentiments, and by their moral application." Mr. Gray has told us that the hint was taken from Antiſtrophe I. of the firſt choral ode in the Agamemnon of Æſchylus; and it is in the true ſpirit of that ſublime author: the third ſtanza indeed catches a feature from the Ode to Fortune, but it is highly improved and dignified. "Of this piece, at once poetical and rational, I will not, ſays the Critic, by ſlight objections violate the dignity." This is a gracious forbearance, conſidering his alacrity in cenſuring: but it muſt be obſerved that this penurious praiſe is all that is afforded to three beautiful and ſublime Odes: critical obſervations, which only aim to point out the defects, but overlook the beauties of an author, may be deemed faſtidious, certainly they are not candid.

I have before ſaid that the Ode on the Spring is in the brighteſt manner of Pindar; and that the Hymn to Adverſity is in the true ſpirit of Æſchylus: this may require an explanation. The Odes of the latter writer are accompaniments to his Tragic Muſe, and as they attend her through the aweful ſcenes of miſery, terror, vengeance, and blood, they take their colouring from thence; they become religious inquiries into the diſpenſations of the gods, or melancholy reflections on the inſtability of human greatneſs, or obſcure predictions or gloomy preſages of the dreadful cataſtrophe of the drama: the elevated genius of the author has often given them a terrible ſublimity. The Engliſh reader is now, or may be, well acquainted with this great writer; it is therefore unneceſſary to extend this obſervation further. Pindar was employed in a more pleaſing, at leaſt in a more chearful taſk; his Muſe was courted to cele-

brate the victors in the public games of Greece; his Odes are feſtal ſongs recounting glories, conqueſts, and joy; they take their colouring from their ſubject; every thing in them is ſplendid, animated, and gay; or if at any time he is led to conſider adverſe fortune, or the vanity of human life, the reflection is generally ſhort, he ſoon returns to his uſual chearfulneſs, and every thing around, like the face of Nature after a ſhower, becomes more freſh, more bright, and more ſmiling: his genius at the ſame time was impetuous and rapid, and carried him to the nobleſt heights of the ſublime. That the Engliſh reader may be enabled to form ſome idea of this Poet's manner, however imperfect, I have ventured to give a tranſlation of one of his Odes; thoſe, who are acquainted with the original, will be ſenſible of the difficulty of the taſk.

Mr. Gray calls the Progreſs of Poetry a Pindaric Ode: how happily he has imitated the ſmiling beauty, as well as the great manner of his maſter, may eaſily be ſeen. The firſt Stanza rolls along in the fervor of enthuſiaſm, various, ſweet, and magnificent as its ſubject. Dr. Johnſon ſays "he is one of thoſe that are willing to be pleaſed, and therefore would gladly find the meaning of this firſt Stanza." Had the Critic been pleaſed to find the meaning of Horace, he could not have failed of finding the ſame pleaſure from this paſſage, the high metaphorical expreſſions of which are drawn from thence;

Monte decurrens velut amnis, imbres
Quem ſuper notas aluere ripas,
Fervet, immenſuſque ruit profundo
Pindarus ore;

Laureâ

Laureâ donandus Apollinari,
Seu per audaces nova dithyrambos
Verba devolvit, numeriſque fertur
Lege ſolutis.

So Cowley ſtyles it an unnavigable ſong; and the Poet here tells us, that "the ſubject and ſimile, as uſual with Pindar, are united;" a beautiful and ſublime inſtance of which we have in the opening of the ſixth Olympic Ode, to which I refer the learned reader. So much for the Critic's charge of confuſion, nonſenſe, and impertinence in this Stanza. In the ſecond, the addreſs to the Enchanting Shell is truly Pindaric, and its power to controul the frantic Paſſions is expreſſed in the noble imagery of that ſublime author: yet the Critic ſays "the ſecond Stanza, exhibiting Mars's car and Jove's eagle, is unworthy of further notice. Criticiſm diſdains to chaſe a ſchool-boy to his common places." Criticiſm needs not be ſo diſdainful. When the antient Mythology is introduced into times, and manners, and ſubjects, to which it has no relation, it is puerile and juſtly reprehenſible; but there are occaſions and circumſtances which ſeem to require its uſe; and in theſe to deny it a place is unreaſonable prejudice, particularly as it abounds with poetical images, of which we have two fine inſtances in this Stanza. The alluſions of this Ode are of claſſical antiquity; the car of Mars and * the eagle of Jupiter have

* Mr. Gray modeſtly ſays, "this is a weak imitation of ſome incomparable lines in the firſt Pythian of Pindar." This was not ſaid without reaſon: the Eagle is there fixed upon the ſceptre of Jupiter; the image ſhould have been preſerved.

With

have the ſtamp of the ſame times with the Æolian lyre and the ſprings of Helicon.

The third Stanza charms us with a delightful aſſemblage of gay ideas;

Softly ſweet, in Lydian meaſures,
Soon he ſooth'd the ſoul to pleaſures;

and ſhows that he is equally maſter of thoſe airs which "lap the land in extaſy," as of that dreadful harmony which appalls the ſoul; here, if ever, the Graces ſtrung the lyre; σὺν ἐυθυζώνοισι Χαριτεσσι γεγωνεῖ. Even Dr. Johnſon acknowleges that this Stanza "has ſomething pleaſing." But it is not allowed to paſs uncenſured. "Idalia's *velvet-green* has ſomething of cant. An epithet or metaphor drawn from Nature ennobles Art; an epithet or metaphor drawn from Art degrades

With ruffled plumes, and flagging wing,

does not well expreſs ὠκεῖαν πτέρυγ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν χάλαξαις.

ὁ δὲ κνώσσων
ὑγρὸν νῶτον ἀιωρεῖ, τεᾶις
ῥιπᾶισι καλασχόμενος,

is an appropriated image, which ſhows that the poet looked at nature with a painter's eye; it is omitted in the imitation. But in juſtice to Mr. Gray it muſt be acknowleged that his two laſt lines,

Quench'd in dark clouds of ſlumber lie
The terror of his beak, and light'nings of his eye,

are at leaſt equal to the great original: the image of Mars is far ſuperior: the hills of Thrace judiciouſly fix the locality in learned alluſion to the Rhodopeian Orpheus; the repreſentation of the god curbing the fury of his car, and dropping his lance, is Mr. Gray's own.

Nature."

Nature," What then becomes of the vitrea unda, of the pictæ volucres, of the gay enamel'd colours of bloſſoms and fruits, of the embroider'd vale, the fringed banks, and all thoſe beautiful images drawn from Art, with which the beſt writers antient and modern have embelliſhed Nature? The Arts in their infancy were obliged to borrow many terms from their rich parent Nature; but as they advanced to maturity, they amply repaid the loan; from that time the metaphor and the metonymy have ranged at will from Nature to Art, and from Art to Nature; and as it is the province of Art to adorn Nature, ſo the terms of Art have the ſame happy effect in enriching language. On this head Dr. Johnſon will perhaps pay ſome deference to the authority of the learned Critic, who, comparing the ſtyle of Dryden with that of Pope, ſays " Dryden's page is a natural field, riſing into inequalities, and diverſified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation; Pope's is a *velvet lawn*, ſhaven by the ſcythe, and levelled by the roller."

The Critic proceeds. " Of the ſecond ternary of ſtanzas, the firſt endeavours to tell ſomething, and would have told it, had it not been croſſed by Hyperion." He ſeems not to underſtand the Poet, though the meaning of the paſſage is clearly explained in a note ſubjoined to it. From the pleaſing ideas and captivating melody of the foregoing Stanza the attention of the reader is called in a graver ſtrain to the ills which attend human life; yet even theſe, the Poet tells us, are cheared by the Muſe, as the ſickly dews and ſpectres of the night are diſpelled by the riſing ſun: he therefore does tell us ſomething, and ſomething very much to the purpoſe; this ſtanza expreſſes a

philoſophical truth with poetic elegance, and the claſſical image of Hyperion croſſes nothing, but is croſſed by the perverſe ſpirit of ſombrous Criticiſm.

" The ſecond Stanza, ſays the Critic, deſcribes well enough the univerſal prevalence of Poetry; but I am afraid that the concluſion will not riſe from the premiſes. The caverns of the North and the plains of Chili are not the reſidences of *Glory* and *generous Shame*." This is not ſaid, nor even implied. The general poſition is " the extenſive influence of poetic genius over the remoteſt and moſt uncivilized nations." The fragments of the Northern Bards here referred to, and particularly the Poems of Oſſian, (which, whoever was their author, ſounded from the caverns of the North) not only cheared the ſhivering native's dull abode, but breathe the high ſpirit of Glory and Liberty. The Muſe too deigns to hear the ſavage youth on the plains of Chili raiſe his wild notes to War and Love, with both which Glory and Liberty are in cloſe connexion; ſo that the concluſion will ariſe from the premiſes, " Liberty, and the virtues that naturally attend on it, purſue the track of Poetry."

And this is a fine introduction to the next Stanza, which tells us that in the evil hour of ſlavery the Muſes left their Greece for the Latian plains; and that diſdaining to dwell there with tyrant power and coward vice they next ſought the ſea-encircled coaſt of Albion. The ſighs of Greece for the loſs of Liberty and the Muſes are expreſſed in ſuch a ſober ſtrain of mournful melody as ſoftens and ſubdues the ſoul. Of this the Critic ſays " the third ſtanza ſounds big with *Delphi*, and *Egean*, and *Iliſſus*, and *Meander*, and *hallow'd fountain*, and

ſolemn

ſolemn ſound; but in all Gray's Odes there is a kind of cumbrous ſplendor which we wiſh away." In like manner Virgil ſounds big with Groves, and Foreſts, and Naids, and Parnaſſus, and Aonia, and Aganippe;

Quæ nemora, aut qui vos ſaltus habuere, puellæ
Naiades, indigno cum Gallus amore periret?
Nam neque Parnaſſi vobis juga, nam neque Pindi
Ulla moram fecere, neque Aonia Aganippe.

Milton imitates this big language,

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorſeleſs deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the ſteep,
Where your old Bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the ſhaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva ſpreads her wiſard ſtream.

The Bard Maſon too muſt be poetical, and claſſical, and talk big; witneſs his addreſs to the Muſes,

Stay then awhile, O ſtay, ye fleeting fair;
Reviſit yet nor hallow'd Hippocrene,
Nor Theſpiæ's groves; till with harmonious teen
Ye ſooth his ſhade, and ſlowly-dittied air.
Such tribute pour'd, again ye may repair
To what lov'd haunt ye whilom did elect;
Whether Lycæus, or that mountain fair,

Trim Mænalus, with piny verdure deckt.
But now it boots you not in theſe to ſtray,
Or yet Cyllene's hoary ſhade to chuſe,
Or where mild Ladon's welling waters play.

I make no apology for the length of theſe quotations; the lines of each poet are enchantingly ſweet, and their beauties were univerſally admired, till in good time Dr. Johnſon aroſe to correct the public taſte. Yet, before we extinguiſh this ſplendor, cumbrous as it may be deemed, let me preſume to ſuggeſt to his conſideration that it is of the eſſence of Poetry to give locality to perſons and things: thus Apollo is bathing his locks in the pure dews of Caſtalia, or rejoicing in his native Delos; the Muſes are Aonian or Pierian; the lyre is Leſbian or Æolian; the bow is Parthian; the arrow Cydonian, and the ſword a rude barbarian from the mines of Scythia: the claſſic Muſe delights in this pomp of diction; it is the robe of ſtate with which ſhe arrays her ſelf, and let no rude hand preſume to rend it from her.

An heavier charge is next prepared againſt the Poet: "his poſition is at laſt falſe: in the time of Dante and Petrarch, from whom he derives our firſt ſchool of Poetry, Italy was over-run by *tyrant power* and *coward vice*; nor was our ſtate much better when we firſt borrowed the Italian arts." This could not have been ſaid but through a total miſconception of the Poet's hiſtorical deduction, which, in few words, is this, "When Conſtantinople ſubmitted to the arms of Mahomet the Great, Athens and all Greece were enſlaved by the conquering Turks; this fatal event drove many of the moſt learned

learned Greeks into Italy, where they were liberally encouraged by the Popes and the illuſtrious Houſe of Medici, under whoſe patronage literature and the fine arts flouriſhed for awhile: thus the Muſes

Left their Parnaſſus for the Latian plains;

but finding them over-run with tyrant power and coward vice, they diſdained to fix their reſidence there, and ſought a refuge in England: happily they found it: the long reign of Edward III. was an æra of glory; that of his unhappy ſon was ſtrongly marked with the high ſpirit of liberty; in thoſe times Chaucer lived and flouriſhed, greatly favoured by both thoſe kings." This juſtifies the truth of Mr. Gray's poſition; his concluſion no friend to virtue and literature will controvert.

The firſt Engliſh Poet here mentioned is Shakeſpear. What the Critic ſays of the mythological birth given him ariſes from a miſtake: Milton indeed has done this, where he calls him *Fancy's Child*; Mr. Gray ſays nothing of his birth; he ſtyles him Nature's Darling, and ſays that *the* Mighty Mother unveiled her aweful face to him when a child; to ſignify the glow of his imagination, ſhe is repreſented as giving him a pencil; whoſe colours richly paint the vernal year; and, to expreſs his power over the paſſions, two golden keys, one of which unlocks the gates of joy, the other thoſe of terror and pity: this is happily conceived, and expreſſed with clear and elegant ſimplicity. The ſeraphic ſublimity of Milton is greatly characteriſed. " The car of Dryden, ſays the Critic, with his two courſers, has nothing in it peculiar; it is a car

in

in which any other rider may be placed." More judgement as well as candor had been ſhown in pointing out the Pindaric imagery, and obſerving that this car is borne wide over the fields of glory by

Two courſers of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder cloath'd, and long-reſounding pace.

The mention of Dryden's Ode in honour of St. Cecilia's day is unnoticed: the richneſs of imagination, the felicity of expreſſion, and the ſweetneſs of numbers, with which that noble torrent of enthuſiaſm is celebrated, could not extort praiſe, but they ſtrike cenſure dumb. The latter part of this concluding ſtanza ſhows at leaſt that Mr. Gray had the uncommon happineſs to ſpeak of himſelf with grace; but it is the province of the Critic to place him in that high ſtation in the realms of Poetry, which his own modeſty would not allow him to aſſume.

From the moſt elegant and moſt pleaſing we come now to the grandeſt and ſublimeſt effort of the Lyric Muſe: forcible conception, a fervor of enthuſiaſm, and a terrible greatneſs characteriſe the Bard. They, who think it an imitation of the Prophecy of Nereus, depreciate this Ode through a partial fondneſs for antiquity; it is the genuine production of Mr. Gray's vigorous genius, animated perhaps by ſome wonderful paſſages of Æſchylus. But the ſuppoſition ſerves well enough to introduce Dr. Johnſon's cold and taſteleſs Criticiſm. "To copy, ſays he, is leſs than to invent, and the copy has been unhappily produced at a wrong time. The fiction of Horace was to the Romans credible; but its revival diſguſts us with apparent

apparent and unconquerable falſehood. To ſelect a ſingular event, and ſwell it to a giant's bulk by fabulous appendages of ſpectres and predictions, has little difficulty, for he that forſakes the probable may always find the marvellous." And again, "in the third ſtanza we have the puerilities of obſolete mythology. When we are told that *Cadwallo huſh'd the ſtormy main*, and that *Modred* made *huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud top'd head*, attention recoils from the repetition of a tale that, even when it was firſt heard, was heard with ſcorn." The miſfortune is, this Critic is for regulating poetic imagination by the ſtandard of methodical argumentation and philoſophical truth; as if the excurſions of Shakeſpear's fancy were to be meaſured by the theorems of Euclid. Fiction is the province of this kind of poetry, which delights in the marvellous that barely comes within the verge of poſſibility: it has an ideal world of its own peopled with imaginary beings, and builds its agreeable deluſions on the light foundations of fancy, popular belief, old traditions, and vulgar ſuperſtitions; hence, as a fine writer obſerves *, "the Poet, who can give to ſplendid inventions and to fictions new and bold, the air and authority of reality and truth, is maſter of the genuine ſources of the Caſtalian ſpring, and may juſtly be ſaid to draw his inſpiration from the *well-head of pure poeſy*.

On theſe principles the antients allowed the mythological fictions of their Poets, though in reality no more credible to them than later ſuperſtitions are to us; and in all ages popular belief has been the allowable foundation of poetic fiction.

* Eſſay on the Writings and Genius of Shakeſpear.

"Even when a popular opinion has long been exploded, and has become repugnant to univerſal belief, the fictions built upon it are ſtill admitted as natural, becauſe (ſays the * philoſophical Critic) they were accounted ſuch by the people to whom they were firſt addreſſed; whoſe ſentiments and views of things we are willing to adopt, when, by the power of pleaſing deſcription, we are introduced into their ſcenes, and made acquainted with their manners." Wretched as the mythology in Oſſian's Poems is, attention recoils not from the delirious fancy, but we feel ourſelves impreſſed with the ideas of the Northern Bard, and even catch his enthuſiaſm: I envy not the heart that can turn, with an incredulus odi, from images like this, "Trenmor came from his hill at the voice of his mighty Son. A cloud, like the ſteed of the ſtranger, ſupported his aery limbs. His robe is like the miſt of Lano, that brings death to the people. His ſword is a green meteor half-extinguiſhed. His face is without form, and dark. He ſighed thrice over the Hero; and thrice the winds of the night roared around."—The war of Caros.—

On theſe principles we admit the Spirit of the Cape in the Luſiad of Camoens, the Witches and Fairies of Shakeſpear, his aerial Beings attendant on Proſpero, and the delicate machinery of the Sylphs in the Rape of the Lock.

Sans tous ces ornaments le vers tombe en langueur;
La Poeſie eſt morte, ou rampe ſans vigueur:
Le poëte n' eſt plus qu' un orateur, timide,
Qu' un froid hiſtorien d' une fable inſipide.—Boileau.

* Dr. Beattie's Eſſay on Poetry &c. Part 1. ch. 11.

But

But this ſubject, particularly as it relates to Gothic and Celtic ſuperſtitions and manners, has been treated with ſo much preciſion and elegance by the two beſt Critics of this or any other age, that one is aſtoniſhed to find a perſon, who has read the Letters on Chivalry, and the Diſcourſe on Præternatural Beings in the Eſſay on the Genius and Writings of Shakeſpear, ſpeaking with contempt of the Magnanima Menſogna of the Bard.

The Critic ſeems almoſt to have contented himſelf with his general cenſure of the poetic fiction; he makes but few objections to particular paſſages of this Ode; and theſe are in the ſame ſpirit of arbitrary and unmannered Criticiſm. "The Stanzas, he ſays, are too long, eſpecially his Epodes." Pindar has many longer. "Of the firſt ſtanza the abrupt beginning has been celebrated; but technical beauties can give praiſe only to the inventor." The rules of Art are deduced from original beauties, and all beauties will give praiſe to every writer, who uſes them with judgement. It is the praiſe of Homer that he hurries his reader in medias res non ſecus ac notas: does the ſame artful management devolve no praiſe on Virgil, becauſe the beauty is technical? Mr. Gray's Ode muſt have a beginning; if he has formed it with judgement, if it is ſuch as the ſituation of the Bard ſeems to require, it has been juſtly celebrated. But "it is in the power of any man to ruſh abruptly upon his ſubject, that has read the ballad of Johnny Armſtrong,

Is there ever a man in all Scotland ——"

The Critic here affects to be pleaſant,

aſper
Incolumi gravitate jocum tentavit :

it is equally in the power of any man to ruſh upon a rude jeſt, who does not feel abaſhed at offending againſt delicacy and good manners.

" The initial reſemblances, or alliterations, *ruin, ruthleſs, helm nor hauberk*, are below the grandeur of a poem that endeavours at ſublimity." Of this figure, for with that name it has been dignified, much might be ſaid, much has been ſaid, and enough for every good purpoſe by the late excellent Mr. Harris in his Philological Inquiries. Part II. Ch. iv. Perhaps this concurrence of the letters was merely accidental ; be that as it will, the words are the moſt proper for the Poet's purpoſe of any in our language ; and ſurely it would have been a ridiculous affectation in him to have gone out of his way and have choſen worſe, becauſe theſe happened to have initial reſemblances. After all, what occaſion of cenſure do they give ? Should Dr. Johnſon reprobate the ſecond lines of theſe beautiful couplets,

New ſorrow riſes, as the day returns,
A ſiſter ſickens, or a daughter mourns.
Vanity of Human Wiſhes.

Ye glitt'ring train ! whom Lace and Velvet bleſs,
Suſpend the ſoft ſollicitudes of dreſs.
Prologue to Irene.

Our daring Bard, with ſpirit unconfin'd,
Spreads wide the mighty moral for mankind. — Ib.

no perſon, who has an ear, would take part with the Critic. But theſe lines, it may be ſaid, affect not grandeur, endeavour not at ſublimity. Let us then turn to ſuch as do, and hear the heroic Leontius,

And is it thus Demetrius meets his friend,
Hid in the mean diſguiſe of Turkiſh robes,
With ſervile ſecreſy to lurk in ſhades——

Again,

The groaning Greeks break up their golden caverns——

Once more,

The dreadful diſſonance of barb'rous triumph —

Nor muſt we omit the Moral of this tragedy,

Weak man with erring rage may throw the dart,
But heav'n ſhall guide it to the guilty heart.

The weaving of the winding ſheet Mr. Gray borrows, as he owns, from the Northern Bards; therefore it is not, what this Critic's harſh language ſtyles it, *Theft*. He deſcribes the ſlaughtered Bards as weaving the web; but was this *work of death* only proper for women, becauſe in another mythology *the thread of life* was ſpun by female hands? Is the fiction outrageous and incongruous, which was adopted from the wild but animated ideas of the Bards of thoſe times? — Whether the Poet has uſed the words *warp* and *woof* with propriety we ſhall be able to judge when Dictionary-makers ſhall have ſettled the preciſe meaning of thoſe terms; in the mean time the public probably will not think itſelf deeply intereſted in the queſtion.

I cannot quit this ſubject without taking a review of the Ode. The Bard, as Dr. Beattie, who caught the enthuſiaſm of the Poet, finely obſerves, " juſt eſcaped from the Maſſacre of his brethren, under the complicated agitations of grief, revenge, and deſpair, and ſurrounded with the ſcenery of rocks, mountains, and torrents, ſtupendous by nature, and now rendered hideous by deſolation, imprecates perdition upon the bloody Edward." The effect of this imprecation on the tyrant and his warrior chiefs is greatly repreſented by images of varied terror; the king's creſted pride was diſmayed;

Stout Glo'ſter ſtood aghaſt in ſpeechleſs trance:
To arms! cried Mortimer, and couch'd his quiv'ring lance.

The deſcription of the Bard adds to the great ideas of Raphael and Milton a wild dignity of ſorrow which ſtrikes us with awe. His lamentations over his ſlaughtered brethren call for revenge in ſtrains of dreadful harmony. Amidſt theſe woe-wild notes he ſees their ſpirits ſitting on a diſtant cliff, and weaving the ample winding-ſheet of Edward's race; on this, " ſeized with prophetic enthuſiaſm, he foretells in the moſt alarming ſtrains, and typifies by the moſt dreadful images the diſaſters that were to overtake his family and deſcendents." And now, " The work is done." The airy images melt away in a track of light that fires the weſtern ſkies. Yet other viſions, viſions of glory, now burſt upon his ſight; he beholds in a a prophetic extaſy a ſucceſſion of genuine kings, of the line of Tudor, regain their ſovereignty; the deep ſorrows of his lyre are now changed to meaſures of tranſport and rapture; he hails the Bards of future times, whoſe voices

reach his ear, and with ſtrains of defiance and triumph, ſeeing his death inevitable, (like the poor mariner that leaps from his burning ſhip into the ſea) to preſerve himſelf from the outrages of his enemies he plunges from the mountain's height into the roaring tide below.

The wild and romantic ſcenery, the ſtrength of conception, the boldneſs of the figures, the terrible ſublimity, the ſolemn ſpirit of prophecy, and the animated glow of viſions of glory render this "the fineſt Ode in the world." The language of Gray is always pure, peculiarly compact and nervous, ever appropriated to his ſubject; when that is gay and ſmiling, his diction is elegant and glittering; in the ſober reflections of ſaintly melancholy it is grave and ſolemn; and it riſes with an elevated dignity along with the boldeſt flights of his ſublime imagination; and his numbers, regulated by a fine taſte and a nice ear, have through all their various modulations a rich and copious harmony. Gray inherited the ample pinion of the Theban Eagle, and ſails with ſupreme dominion through the azure deep of air; but he never ſinks to that humiliating lowneſs to which not want of genius, but the poverty of his ſubject often depreſſes the Theban's fluttering pennons: he therefore has a claim to the higheſt rank in the realms of Lyric Poety. This teſtimony to his merit would from any lover of literature have been an act of juſtice; but from the tranſlator of Æſchylus, who owes ſo much to him, it is a debt of Gratitude.

What could induce Dr. Johnſon, who as a good man might be expected to favour goodneſs, as a ſcholar to be candid to a man of learning, to attack this excellent perſon and poet with

ſuch

ſuch outrage and indecency, we can only conjecture from this obſervation, " there muſt be a certain ſympathy between the book and the reader to create a good liking." Now it is certain that the Critic has nothing of this ſympathy, no portion nor ſenſe of that vivida vis animi, that etherial flame which animates the poet; he is therefore as little qualified to judge of theſe works of imagination, as the ſhivering inhabitant of the caverns of the North to form an idea of the glowing ſun that flames over the plains of Chili.

Dr. Johnſon knows well that " all Truth is valuable, and that ſatyrical criticiſm may be conſidered as uſeful, when it rectifies error and improves judgement; he that refines the publick taſte is a publick benefactor." Under this idea he will value the truth of theſe obſervations; and upon a more careful review of this Ode of Gray he will perhaps diſcover that it has ſome little uſe, that it promotes one truth; " it makes kings fear to be tyrants, tyrants to manifeſt their tyrannical humours." Few indeed are the pages any where to be found from which ſome uſeful inſtruction may not be derived by thoſe who are diſpoſed to receive it; even theſe may be a leſſon to literary tyrants to bear their faculties meekly, to favour the Progreſs of Poetry, and to ſpare the Bard.

THE NINTH

PYTHIAN ODE

OF

PINDAR

TRANSLATED.

THE NINTH

PYTHIAN ODE

OF

PINDAR.

To TELESICRATES of CYRENE,

VICTOR IN THE FOOT RACE IN ARMOUR.

STROPHE I.

HIGH the willing ſong I raiſe,
The deep-zon'd Graces aid the ſtrain
Tun'd to the Pythian victor's praiſe,
His brazen ſhield borne o'er the plain.
Bleſt Youth, Cyrene's pride and grace,
Fam'd for her manag'd courſers gen'rous race.
Her once in Pelion's ruſtling vales,
His looſe locks ſtreaming to the wanton gales,

Apollo ſeiz'd; and thence convey'd
To Libya's paſtur'd plains, and cultur'd fields,
High on his golden car the huntreſs maid;
To the lov'd Fair thoſe blooming regions yields;
Fixes her ſeat in that delightful land,
A third of Earth's firm globe beneath her ſoft command.

ANTISTROPHE.

Silver-ſandal'd Venus there
Her hand with courteous grace addreſt,
And lightly touch'd the heav'n-wrought car,
Proud to receive her Delian gueſt;
Then their ſweet bridal bed t'adorn
Sent Modeſty ſoft-bluſhing like the Morn;
Thus to the god his virgin bride,
From wide-commanding Hypſeus ſprung, affied.
He, from the monarch of the main
The ſecond in deſcent, illuſtrious name,
Held o'er the haughty Lapithæ his reign:
Him in the vales of Pindus known to fame
A Naid, Nymph from Gaia ſprung, of yore
Of her Penëus proud the fond Creuſa bore.

EPODE.

Beneath his royal roof
The fair Cyrene's opening bloom
The monarch nurtur'd with a parent's pride.
Her nor the labours of the loom,
While through the trembling woof
The quick-returning ſhuttle learns to glide,

Nor the rich pleaſures of the feaſt
Amidſt the female band, delight:
But the bright ſpear, the arrow wing'd for flight,
And in the chace to pierce the ſavage beaſt;
That ſafe through paſtur'd mead and grove
Her father's herds in peace might rove:
At morn's approach ſhe ſeeks a ſhort repoſe;
Sleep on her couch attends her willing eyes to cloſe.

STROPHE II.

Her the diſtant-wounding god,
His quiver rattling by his ſide
As down the rocky ſteep he trod,
With a fierce lion grappling ſpied;
Alone he ſaw the virgin ſtand,
Nor ſpear nor falchion arm'd her daring hand:
To Chiron ſtrait his voice addreſt,
Haſte, Son of Phillyra, at my requeſt
Come from thy venerable cave;
See and admire this virgin; undiſmaid
See that fair form the dang'rous conflict brave,
A force, a ſpirit above the toil diſplay'd:
Say from what root this lovely plant is ſprung,
Sweet-blooming 'midſt theſe crags with darkſome ſhades
o'erhung.

ANTISTROPHE.

Ardent ſee her noble fire
Amidſt the fierce encounter glow.

Indulgent to my fond deſire
My hand will Heav'n's juſt Pow'r allow
To ſeize her, and in this bleſt hour
Crop from its verdant ſtalk this honied flow'r?
With aſpect mild and courteous grace,
A conſcious ſmile bright-glowing on his face,
The gen'rous Centaur thus replied,
Perſuaſion is the key of hallow'd Love;
That can unlock the ſecrets this would hide;
Alike in men below, in gods above,
When firſt they feel the ſoul-enkindling flame,
A modeſt awe forbids their ſoft deſire to name.

EPODE.

Thee, to whom Falſehood's tongue
Dares not the guileful fable feign,
Thy gentle manners thus to ſpeak incline.
Doſt thou, O royal Phoebus, deign
Aſk whence this virgin ſprung?
The deſtin'd end of all things it is thine,
And all their various ways, to know:
How many leaves in ſpring are ſeen
Wave o'er the genial earth their chearful green;
Where the vaſt ocean beats, where rivers flow,
How many ſands the ſhores contain
By wild winds roll'd or billowy main:
Doth not thine eye whate'er the fates decree,
Th' events of future times, and whence they ſpring, foreſee?

STROPHE III.

Muſt I vie then with the wiſe?
Then I will ſpeak. The virgin bride,
The bridegroom thou, thy lovely prize,
From this rude vale art come to guide;
Her o'er the ocean ſhalt thou bear,
And in Jove's fragrant garden place the Fair,
Collected there the iſland train,
Where the mount ſwells amidſt th' encircling plain.
In ſplendid manſions rich with gold
Libya, for wide-extended meads renown'd,
Exulting ſhall th' illuſtrious Nymph behold;
And, that on Laws an empire ſhe may found,
Part of her realms aſſign, her queen to grace,
Not bare of fruitful plants, nor void of beaſts of chace.

ANTISTROPHE.

There a ſon ſhall crown thy love:
Him from the raptur'd mother's care
The noble Hermes ſhall remove,
And to the * Hours and Gaia bear,
Whoſe gorgeous ſeats their ſtate diſplay;
They on their knees the ſmiling babe ſhall lay,
Shall Nectar through his lips diſtill,
And with Ambroſia, food celeſtial, fill;

* This is ſaid with great propriety: as the Patron of agriculture he was to be inſtructed by the Hours quo ſidere terram vertere; by Gaia, arvorum quæ robora cuique.

Immortal as his ſacred fire,
As Jove immortal ſhall they raiſe the boy ;
Him ſhall his friends their dear delight admire,
O'er ſpatious plains to lead the flocks his joy ;
Thy Ariſtæus thus ſhall riſe to fame,
And him the Hunter ſome, and ſome the Shepherd name.

EPODE.

His words enchanting ſound
Swell the fond wiſh of rapt'rous love.
Ardent the gods, diſdaining cold delay,
Swift by ſhort ways to action move.
That day his wiſhes crown'd.
Around their couch the Loves in Libya play,
Where o'er the ſtately-ſtructur'd town,
High fam'd on Pytho's ſacred plain,
The god delighted holds his guardian reign ;
Whence Teleſicrates now brings renown,
And binds, whilſt Fortune radiant glows,
Freſh wreaths around Cyrene's brows ;
Back to his country, ſeat to Beauty dear,
Pleas'd ſhe the victor ſees the prize of glory bear.

STROPHE IV.

Virtues greatly eminent
Swell the full pomp of copious praiſe :
But he, the noble argument
Who brief in ſplendid phraſe diſplays,

Delights

Delights the wiſe: whate'er you trace,
* Occaſion gives it energy and grace.
Thebes, for ſeven towred gates renown'd,
Saw Iolaus of old with glory crown'd;
And when avenging barb'rous pride,
His falchion thunder'd on the tyrant's head,
Car-borne Amphitryon's honour'd tomb beſide
Laid in her hallow'd earth the hero dead
His grandfire nigh: Thebes once the ſtranger's car
Saw 'midſt her dragon race his ſnowy courſers bear.

* The conduct of the Poet in this Ode deſerves our attention. He begins by declaring his deſire to celebrate the victory of Teleſicrates in the Pythian Games; but conſcious of the barrenneſs of his ſubject,

Exigua cum frænaret materia impetum,

after five lines he leaves his hero to record the hiſtory of the Nymph Cyrene, nor does he return to him till towards the middle of the third Epode, and in ſix lines more his praiſe is again interrupted. Though a reader of taſte, not intereſted in the encomium, may not only forgive him, but be highly pleaſed with the very beautiful digreſſion, yet he might well fear that Teleſicrates would receive it otherwiſe, and, like the Pycta to Simonides, bid him go to his Cyrene for his reward. This accounts for the reflection in the beginning of this Strophe, which is an artful and delicate apology for his own conduct in the preceding part of the Ode, where ſo much is given to Cyrene, and ſo little to Teleſicrates: he then ſhows that the ſeaſonable introduction of a circumſtance is the crown of all praiſe, by an alluſion to the ſtory of Iolaus: nor is this hero introduced at random; for, beſides his near connexion with Hercules and his ſons, whoſe deſcendents were among the firſt coloniſts at Cyrene, the circumſtance of his being buried near the tomb of Amphitryon leads him naturally to the mention of Hercules and Iphicles, the inſtitutors of the Games in which Teleſicrates had been Conqueror: this brings him back to his firſt propoſed deſign, Πυθιονικᾶν Τελεσικρᾶτη γεγωνεῖν, which he then does amply, and with uncommon ſpirit: thus are his bold tranſitions well connected and coherent.

ANTISTROPHE.

ANTISTROPHE.

Sprung from his and Jove's embrace
Two ſons, together giv'n to light,
To high thoughts rais'd Alcmena grace,
Sons of immenſe, unconquer'd might.
Dumb is the tongue untaught to ſound
Thy name, Alcides, through the world renown'd;
That ſings not Dirce's ſtreams, which roll'd
To nurture thee and Iphicles of old:
Grateful your praiſe will I diſplay,
Your bounties hymning high in ſounding ſtrain:
Mine ever be the Graces' brighteſt ray.
The mount of Niſus, and Ægina's plain
Saw thee thrice victor raiſe Cyrene's name,
Nor dark Deſpair was thine, nor ſilent-grieving Shame.

EPODE.

Cyrene's ſons among
Doth one with gen'rous friendſhip glow?
Is there whoſe dark'ning boſom ſwells with hate?
Free let them give his praiſe to flow,
Roll the full tide along,
And hail the labours glorious to the ſtate:
Praiſe e'en a foe who ſeeks renown
By juſt and gen'rous deeds to gain;
So taught the hoary prophet of the main.
Thine, Teleſicrates, th' Olympic crown;
Thee victor oft Minerva's feaſt,
Thy country oft with pride addreſt;

Her ſon each mother wiſh'd thee, and with ſighs
Silent each virgin felt Love's ſofteſt wiſh ariſe.

STROPHE V.

Me, though eager my deſire
Th' impetuous courſe of Song to rein,
Hark! hear you not a voice require
Once more to roll the grateful ſtrain,
Great deeds once more with fame to grace,
And raiſe the antient glory of thy race?
Iraſſa (there in royal ſtate
High on his honour'd throne Antæus ſate)
The ſuitor train attending ſaw;
Ardent to win the Libyan Fair they vied,
Princes, their blood from the ſame ſource who draw,
And foreign Chiefs demand the beauteous bride;
For her bright hair in golden ringlets flows,
And on her bluſhing cheek Love's brighteſt luſtre glows.

ANTISTROPHE.

Whilſt each raptur'd Wooer ſought
This gold-crown'd flow'r of youth to gain,
The monarch ſtrove with anxious thought
The nobleſt nuptials to obtain:
He heard how Danaus of old,
E'er half its courſe the radiant day had roll'd,
In ſhorteſt ſpace at Argos found
With bridal wreaths his fifty daughters crown'd:
Rang'd at the goal the virgin band,
A radiant line, the father will'd to place;

Then to th' impatient lovers gave command
To wing with flying feet the rapid race;
Thus ſage decreed all conteſts to decide,
And, as they reach'd the goal, each hero choſe his bride.

EPODE.

The Libyan thus decreed
To higheſt worth the royal maid:
Her a bright mark the lengthen'd courſe to bound,
In radiant-tinctur'd robes array'd,
He plac'd, the victor's meed;
And thus addreſs'd the youths that clos'd him round;
Let him, who firſt ſhall touch her veſt,
Lead her, his toils to crown, his prize.
Swift as the wind Alexidamus flies,
And with his hand her hand enraptur'd preſt;
Then led her to his warlike train,
Whoſe proud ſteeds paw'd Numidia's plain;
They ſcatter'd round him wreaths and verdant boughs,
As Conqueſt oft before with laurels bound his brows.